


Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden Naming Proposal

March 18, 2021

Christine Abrell, Nancy Carol Carter,
Jackie Higgins and Audrey Tamayo



Why Rename the Cactus Garden?

1. Remember Kate Sessions' contributions to the garden
2. Signify the direct relationship between the garden and San Diego's early known horticulturist
3. Honor Kate Sessions' role in introducing cacti and succulents to Balboa Park
4. To recall the Kate O. Sessions Aloe & Agave Garden
5. Reduce naming confusion with other gardens

Kate O. Sessions

- Called “Mother of Balboa Park”
- Honored with “Kate O. Sessions Day” on Sept. 24, 1935 as part of the 1935 Exposition
- Early known horticulturalist in San Diego
 - possessed valuable understanding of San Diego’s climate and exotic plants



History of Kate O. Sessions' Advocacy for a Cactus Garden

- 1899: Cacti in Balboa Park would “flourish and bloom and be...of interest to all travellers.”
- 1918: San Diego could be the “world’s cactus center.”
- 1926: San Diego could have an open-air cactus garden that “outrivaled any in the world.”



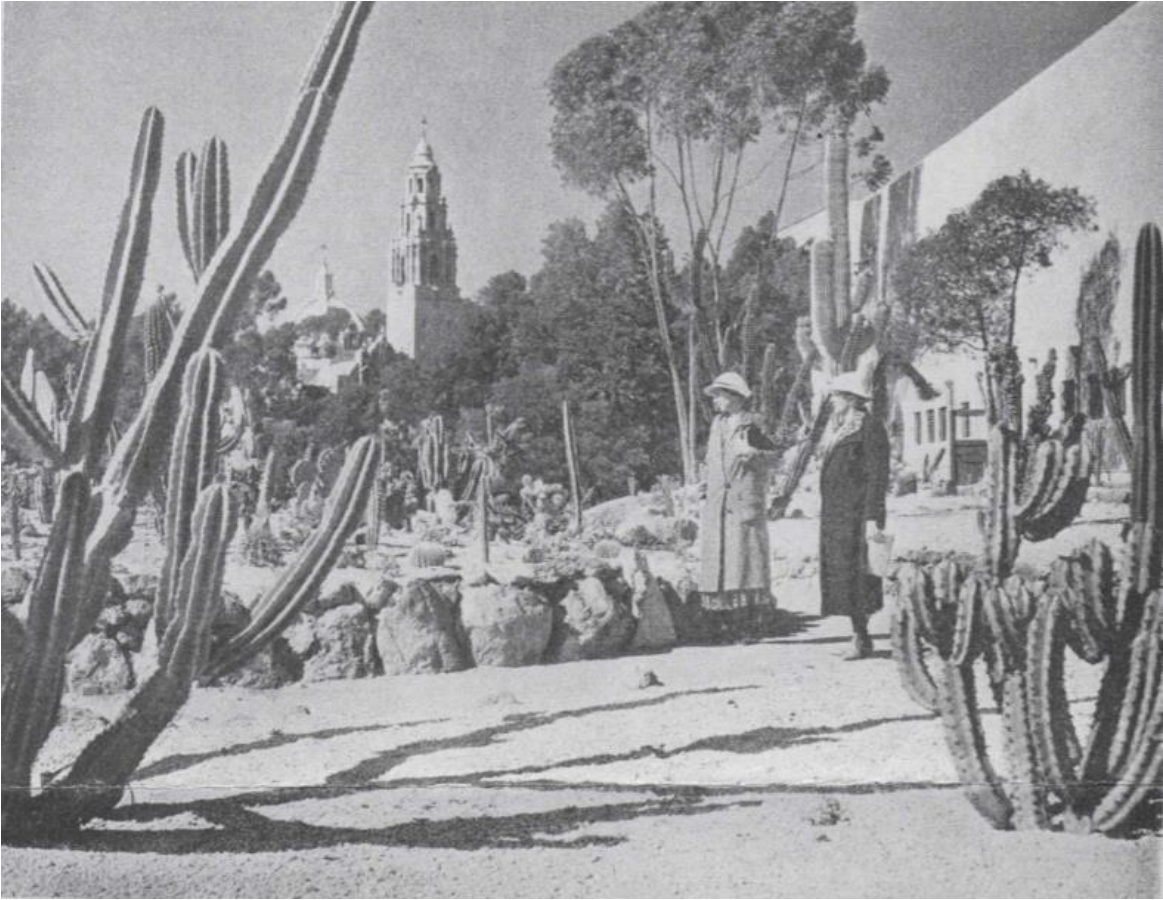
Sessions' Persuasion for a Cactus Garden for the 1935 Exposition



Balboa Park Cactus Garden April 1935

- *California Garden Magazine* 1935:
“earnest efforts” of Sessions to “finally persuade” the Exposition Company to create the cactus garden

Sessions' Role in Cactus Garden



Cactus Garden San Diego Union 1935

- 1935 & 1936: Sessions cited as coordinating donations of cacti specimens
- Jerabek credits Sessions for “making the contacts of majority of the donations”
- Oversaw development of extensive collection of 550 plants
- Received donations throughout southwest



Kate O. Sessions' Role in Cactus Garden (cont.)

- Jerabek designed the Cactus Garden as a tribute to Sessions
- *California Garden* 1935: Sessions “gave her entire collection of cacti to the garden”
- Frequently offered her advice and suggestions to those working in the garden

The Garden's Impact During the 1935 Exposition

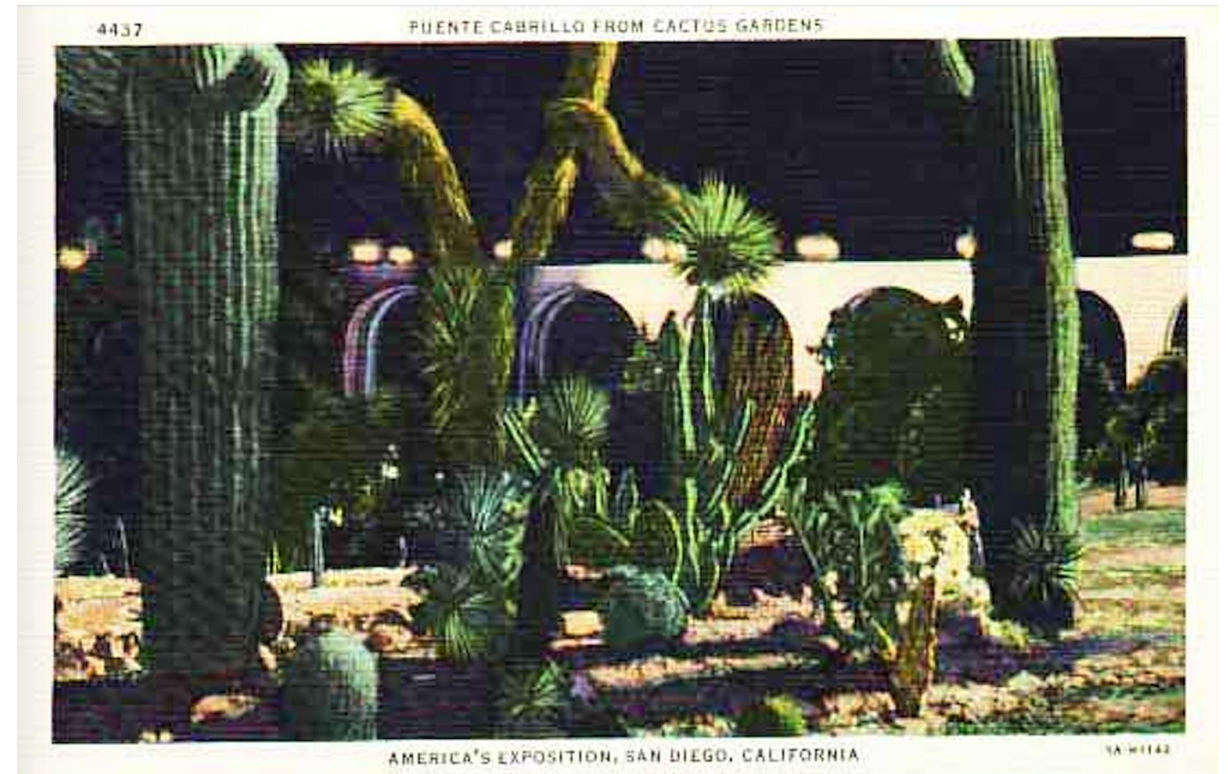


- *San Diego Union*: Named in the top 3 “most interesting permanent gifts to park landscaping” by the Exposition.
- 1936: Sessions says Cactus Garden is “the only real contribution made by the Exposition to the park.”

Findings on Cactus Garden Naming

- Called “Cactus Garden” in 1935 postcard
- Called “Cabrillo Cactus Garden” in a published article
- Often called “Old Cactus Garden” today
- An Official Balboa Park Map from 1999 completely excludes the Cactus Garden

None of these alternative names reflect Sessions’ role in creating this garden.



Kate O. Sessions Aloe & Agave Garden 1935

- Kate O. Sessions Aloe and Agave Garden
 - established 1932
 - dedicated March 23, 1935
 - demolished--paved over for Spanish Village parking lot in 1971



Confusion on the Desert Garden & Cactus Garden

- Nothing remains to tie Kate O. Sessions to her advocacy for cacti and succulents
- The distinctive “Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden” name will clearly distinguish the garden from the Desert Garden.





Conclusions

1. Sessions conceived and oversaw the garden's creation.
2. Direct, but unknown, relationship to Sessions.
3. Kate O. Sessions Aloe & Agave Garden was removed 50 years ago.
4. Linking Sessions to a larger Balboa Park story.
5. Reduce park visitor confusion between Cactus Garden and Desert Garden.

Thank You!

Thank you for your time and thoughts.

Special Acknowledgements to Nancy Carol Carter and Christine Abrell for their extensive research, as well as the San Diego History Center Archives for their assistance in research.

Feedback & Questions

christine@balboapark.org

ncc@sandiego.edu



References

The Journal of San Diego History

- Amero, Richard W. "Samuel Parsons Finds Xanadu in San Diego." *Journal of San Diego History* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1998).
- Amero, Richard W. "San Diego Invites the World to Balboa Park A Second Time." *Journal of San Diego History* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1985).

California Garden

- Jerabek, Chauncy Irving. "More Plants for Exposition Cactus and Succulent Gardens." *California Garden*, November-December 1935, 1.
- Sessions, K.O. "Exposition Cactus Garden." *California Garden*, November-December 1935, 2.
- Jerabek, C.I. "More Cacti." *California Garden*, September 1935, 1.
- Jerabek, C.I. "Cacti...New Cactus Garden in Balboa Park." *California Garden*, August 1935, 5, 8.
- Jerabek, C.I. "A Collecting Trip...Desert Trip for Cactus Specimens." *California Garden*, June 1935, 7.
- Sessions, K.O. "Cactus Display Planned For Exposition." *California Garden*, February-March 1935, 4.

San Diego Reader

- Matthews, Neal. "Neglected Trees of Balboa Park: Color Them Gone, Balboa Park's Future May Be in the Wrong Hands." *San Diego Reader*, December 3, 1987.

San Diego Union

- "Cactus Garden, Plant Displays Expo Features," *San Diego Union*, November 25, 1934, 12.
- "Cactus Planting On Large Scale Planned In Park," *San Diego Union*, March 30, 1935, 23.
- "Federal Funds Will Be Sought For Expo Exhibit," *San Diego Union*, December 24, 1935, 2.
- "Improvements Set For City," *San Diego Union*, December 29, 1935, S.2, P.1.

References cont.

San Diego Union (cont.)

- "Cactus Gardens Display Beauty of Desert Wash," *San Diego Union*, February 2, 1936, 45.
- "Romantic Glamour of New Expo Casts Spell Over All Visitors," *San Diego Union*, March 29, 1936, Expo edition, S.3, P.1.
- "El Monte Park Natural Site for Rock Garden, Assurance," *San Diego Union*, July 17, 1936, 26.
- *San Diego Union*, April 4, 1939, 4.
- "Balboa Park Can Be A Do-It-Yourself 'Happening', " *San Diego Union*, June 9, 1974, G-8 (126).
- Betty Newton, "Balboa Park had its roots in expositions," *San Diego Union*, November 17, 1985, F-37.

Books

- Amero, Richard W. "Chapter 2: Exposition Architecture." In *California Pacific Exposition San Diego 1935-1936*. MS 76, vol. 103. Richard Amero Collection, San Diego History Center Archives, San Diego.
- *Official Guide: Program and Souvenir Picture Book (1935)*. 1935. 25.
- *Official Guide Souvenir Program, 1936*. 1936. 19-20.
- MacPhail, Elizabeth C. *Kate Sessions: Pioneer Horticulturist*. San Diego, CA: San Diego Historical Society, 1976.

Photo Links:

- "Kate Sessions Near Ocotillos in Balboa Park Cactus Garden" <https://www.sandiego.gov/digital-archives-photos/kate-sessions-near-ocotillos-balboa-park-cactus-garden>
- "Kate Sessions near A Saguaro in Balboa Park Cactus Garden" <https://www.sandiego.gov/digital-archives-photos/kate-sessions-near-saguaro-balboa-park-cactus-garden>
- "Cactus Garden behind the New Mexico Building in 1940" <https://www.sandiego.gov/digital-archives-photos/cactus-garden-behind-new-mexico-building-1940>